Gov. Edwards Denies Gift From Park

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By William Lynch
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BATON ROUGE, La., Jan. 25—Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards denied today accusations by a former aide that he received $20,000 in cash from South Korean businessman Tongsun Park.

The charges were made Monday by Clyde Vidrine, a one-time aide who subsequently had differences with Edwards. Vidrine said the incidents he described were part of his testimony Monday to a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C., investigating South Korean influence-buying schemes concerning congressmen.

"He (Vidrine) had a vendetta against me for the past three years," Edwards said at a press conference here.

The governor said that other allegations by Vidrine published in The Washington Post that he helped put together a $60 million rice sale deal with South Korean by arranging with Rep. F. Edward Hebert for additional jet fighter planes for the Asian country were false.

Edwards acknowledged that a meeting was held with South Korean officials about the rice sale on March 22, 1972, as Vidrine had testified. However, the governor said that Tongsun Park was not present at the meeting as Vidrine had claimed.

After that meeting, Edwards said he went to meeting of the Louisiana delegation that included Rep. Hebert to discuss congressional redistricting. Vidrine, he said, did not attend.

No discussion, Edwards said, was held with Hebert about the jet planes. Hebert already has said he did not recall meeting concerning fighter planes.

The governor also denied that sweet potatoes were included in the rice deal as a concession for former Rep. Otto Passman (D.-La.), as Vidrine claimed.

Edwards said the only money that came from Park was $10,000 given to his wife. He claims he knew nothing of the gift until three years later when he was being investigated by the IRS on the basis of the Vidrine allegations.

Edwards has maintained that Park offered him money but he refused it.

The governor said he did not think he would be called to testify before the federal grand jury in Washington.

"I don't think the federal investigators are any more impressed with Vidrine than any other investigators," Edwards said. He was referring to previous investigations of Vidrine allegations that Edwards had sold state jobs for campaign contributions and used campaign contributions for personal use.

No official action ever was taken against Edwards as a result of Vidrine's charges.

The governor cited a statement made last October by Vidrine that supported Edwards version of the cash gift to Mrs. Edwards. Vidrine has since recanted that statement, claiming Edwards asked him to make it.

Edwards said that Vidrine was an alcoholic and that all the previous allegations made by Vidrine were made during drinking sessions.

Vidrine, who says he has not been drinking for some time, said, "He knew I was an alcoholic when he hired me and let me handle $3 million in cash during the campaign.

In the early days of the Edwards administration, Vidrine was a constant companion of the governor and made several gambling trips with him to Las Vegas and London.